110TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION

7

H. R. 6459

To establish an adoption process improvement pilot program.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 10, 2008

Mr. Fattah (for himself and Mr. Souder) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

A BILL

To establish an adoption process improvement pilot program.

- 1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
 3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
 4 This Act may be cited as the "Adoption Improvement Act of 2007".
 5 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.
- 8 (1) Despite the dramatic increase in the num-

Congress finds the following:

- 9 ber of adoptions out of foster care since the enact-
- ment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
- 11 (Public Law 105–89; 111 Stat. 2115), there are still
- 12 114,000 children in foster care with the goal of

- adoption. Of these, only 13 percent are currently living in a preadoptive home. At the same time, in a given year, 240,000 people in the United States will call for information about adopting a child from foster care. Ultimately, however, only a very small fraction of prospective parents interested in adopting children in foster care will end up doing so. As a result, thousands of needy children will remain in foster care and thousands of prospective parents will remain childless.
 - (2) According to a recent study conducted by Harvard University and the Urban Institute in collaboration with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 78 percent of adults who call for information about becoming adoptive parents will not fill out an application or attend an orientation meeting. Only 6 percent of those who call for information actually complete the adoption home study, a requirement for all prospective parents.
 - (3) Research shows that prospective adoptive parents often face a number of barriers that discourage them from adopting children out of foster care, including difficulty in accessing the child welfare agency and unpleasant experiences during critical initial contacts with the child welfare agency, as well

- 1 as ongoing frustration with the agency or aspects of
- 2 the process. The 2 primary ways people learn about
- adoption from foster care are the media and word of
- 4 mouth. Negative experiences with the adoption proc-
- 5 ess have resounding effects as 1 parent's frustration
- 6 is expressed to friends, families, and acquaintances.

7 SEC. 3. CHILD WELFARE AGENCY DEFINED.

- 8 In this Act, the term "child welfare agency" means
- 9 an entity of a State, regional or local area, or Indian tribe,
- 10 that has primary responsibility in such a State, regional
- 11 or local area, or Indian tribe for the facilitation of adop-
- 12 tions from the child welfare system.

13 SEC. 4. GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.

- 14 The Secretary of Health and Human Services (re-
- 15 ferred to in this Act as the "Secretary") shall carry out,
- 16 in accordance with the provisions of this Act, a pilot pro-
- 17 gram of making not less than 10 grants to child welfare
- 18 agencies that is designed to effect long-range improve-
- 19 ments in the adoption process by increasing prospective
- 20 adoptive parent access to adoption information and
- 21 strengthening such agencies responsiveness to prospective
- 22 adoptive parents.

23 SEC. 5. APPLICATION.

- A child welfare agency that desires to receive a grant
- 25 under this Act shall submit an application at such time,

1	in such manner, and accompanied by such information as
2	the Secretary may require.
3	SEC. 6. SELECTION OF GRANT RECIPIENTS.
4	(a) In General.—In awarding grants under this
5	Act, the Secretary shall—
6	(1) select grant recipients on the basis of cri-
7	teria included in regulations promulgated by the
8	Secretary; and
9	(2) take into consideration—
10	(A) the quality of the application;
11	(B) the demonstrated commitment of the
12	applicant to achieving the goals of the pilot pro-
13	gram carried out under this Act; and
14	(C) the geographic diversity of the appli-
15	cant.
16	(b) Criteria.—In establishing criteria under sub-
17	section (a)(1), the Secretary shall include the requirement
18	that for a child welfare agency to be eligible to receive
19	a grant under this Act, such agency shall comply with each
20	of the following:
21	(1) The child welfare agency includes the active
22	involvement of independent, legitimate, marketing
23	and research firms in the design and implementation
24	of the program that will be funded with a grant
25	under this Act. in order to incorporate business and

- consumer product marketing techniques in the recruitment, training, and retention of adoptive parents. The involvement of academic institutions or nonprofit research institutions in the process and follow-up design may also be included.
 - (2) The child welfare agency intends to improve the first contact between prospective adoptive parents and the agency through the following:
 - (A) The establishment of a specialized adoption hotline for tracking incoming calls to better understand the adoptive parent attrition rate.
 - (B) The hiring of employees with a background in counseling and providing specialized adoption training so such employees answer callers' requests efficiently. Training shall emphasize the importance of customer service in addition to traditional counseling skills, address the particular needs of workers and supervisors, and stress the importance of reducing staff turnover.
 - (C) The establishment of a process to solicit and incorporate feedback from all prospective parents, including those who exit the proc-

ess early on, in designing and improving the adoption process.

(3) The child welfare agency—

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- (A) will promote recruitment at the start of the process by providing prospective parents with clear, written guidelines about qualifications and grounds for being screened out; and
- (B) will ensure that all staff are trained in skills needed to engage a prospective parent in the adoption process and, when possible, will separate the recruitment and screening processes.
- (4) The child welfare agency coordinates all adoption sources to afford prospective parents immediate access to all children available for adoption.
- (5) The child welfare agency offers an explicit explanation of the adoption process for all prospective families that includes the roles that various workers play, relationships among the different agencies, and the information necessary to navigate through the process. This information shall include the reasoning behind standard adoption procedures, such as home studies, criminal background checks, and psychological and health evaluations.

1	(6) The child welfare agency shall provide clear
2	information about the matching process, including
3	expected timeline, to prospective parents.
4	(7) The child welfare agency shall provide a
5	clear overview of the adoption process for all pro-
6	spective families, including—
7	(A) the rewards and challenges of the proc-
8	ess;
9	(B) the availability of and the process of
10	accessing adoption assistance;
11	(C) the legal process of adoption; and
12	(D) the availability of post-permanency
13	services.
14	(8) The child welfare agency shall make every
15	effort to involve successful adoptive parents in as-
16	pects of the adoption process, including designing re-
17	cruitment strategies, training, and matching.
18	(9) The child welfare agency shall establish an
19	adoption advisory committee for strengthening pro-
20	cedures for matching waiting children with adoptive
21	parents. The committee shall be composed of adop-
22	tion professionals, successful adoptive parents, and
23	others with expertise in assessing a child's adoption
24	needs for the purpose of improving the matching

process.

1	(10) The child welfare agency shall develop a
2	mentoring system linking prospective and established
3	adoptive parents.
4	(11) The child welfare agency agrees to comply
5	with the evaluation procedures set forth by the agen-
6	cies and research entity described in section 8.
7	SEC. 7. USE OF FUNDS.
8	A child welfare agency that receives a grant under
9	this Act shall use the grant funds only for activities that—
10	(1) decrease the adoptive parent attrition rate
11	as described in section 6; or
12	(2) build upon existing practices that have dem-
13	onstrated effectiveness in improving the adoption
14	process.
15	SEC. 8. STUDY.
16	(a) In General.—In order to provide rigorous re-
17	search utilizing appropriate, scientifically-based research
18	standards, the Secretary shall carry out, through grant or
19	contract, research into the successes and challenges of the
20	programs established through the grants authorized in
21	this Act. Such research shall—
22	(1) employ a standardized data collection too
23	in order to maximize the synthesis of data across

disparate programs;

1	(2) assess the success with which participating
2	agencies implement the program components out-
3	lined in section 6(b);
4	(3) assess the impact, if any, of each program
5	on—
6	(A) the retention and attrition of prospec-
7	tive adoptive parents throughout the adoption
8	process;
9	(B) the professionalization of child welfare
10	professionals responding to adoption inquiries;
11	(C) the number of completed adoptions
12	from foster care; and
13	(D) the maintenance of completed adop-
14	tions, including the impact, if any, of the pro-
15	gram on families' use of post-adoption services;
16	(4) synthesize the successes and challenges of
17	each participating child welfare agency and make
18	recommendations for an overall model of best prac-
19	tice; and
20	(5) offer recommendations regarding improve-
21	ments to the grant program.
22	(b) USE OF EXPERT ENTITY.—The Secretary shall
23	carry out the research described in this section through
24	an entity, including a Federal agency, that has expertise
25	in carrying out research studies relating to adoption, fos-

- 1 ter care, and child welfare issues, such as child welfare
- 2 service provision and the adoption of children from foster
- 3 care.
- 4 (c) Consultation.—In conducting the research de-
- 5 scribed in this section, the expert entity described in sub-
- 6 section (b) shall consult with—
- 7 (1) researchers who are experts in studying
- 8 child welfare services, particularly those focusing on
- 9 best practices regarding the adoption of children
- from foster care;
- 11 (2) child welfare administrators and staff re-
- sponsible for facilitating the adoption of children
- from foster care;
- 14 (3) representatives from national child welfare
- organizations promoting the adoption of children
- 16 from foster care; and
- 17 (4) parents who have adopted children from
- 18 foster care.
- 19 (d) Report to Congress.—Not later than 2 years
- 20 after the dissemination of funds under this Act, the expert
- 21 entity described in subsection (b) shall submit a report
- 22 to the Secretary containing the results of the research de-
- 23 scribed in this section. The report shall also—
- 24 (1) be submitted to the Committee on Edu-
- 25 cation and Labor of the House of Representatives

- 1 and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
- and Pensions of the Senate; and
- 3 (2) be made publicly available.

4 SEC. 9. NATIONWIDE REVIEW.

- 5 The Secretary shall include in the national annual re-
- 6 view of child welfare agencies of the Secretary an examina-
- 7 tion of each State's progress regarding accessibility and
- 8 responsiveness of child welfare agencies to prospective
- 9 adoptive parents.

10 SEC. 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

- 11 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
- 12 this Act \$50,000,000.

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